

Please amend the Application as follows.

**IN THE CLAIMS:**

The present listing of claims replaces all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application.

Claims 1 - 13. (Cancelled).

Claim 14. (Currently Amended) A silicon nitride material comprising:

- (a) a sintering aid[[s]] including at least selected from the group consisting of rare earth metal oxides,  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  and combinations thereof; and
- (b) silicon dioxide;  
the sintering aids and silicon dioxide being present in a grain boundary phase;
- ~~(c) an additive that is retained as a disperse phase, said additive being selected from the group consisting of SiC, TiCN and combinations thereof, and optionally being further selected from the group consisting of TiN,  $\text{HfO}_2$  and combinations thereof; and~~
- ~~(d) a reactive additive selected from the group consisting of  $\text{TiO}_2$ ,  $\text{WO}_3$  and  $\text{MoO}_3$ ;~~

wherein,

- (i) the silicon dioxide in the grain boundary phase and the sintering aid[[s]] ~~including at least  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  in the grain boundary phase~~ have a molar ratio of (silicon dioxide) to (silicon dioxide and sintering aid[[s]] ~~including at least  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$~~ ) that is ~~[[>]] greater than~~ 65%, and
- (ii) the silicon nitride material has a silicon oxide nitride content that is ~~[[<]] less than~~ 1% by weight, and
- (iii) said silicon nitride material has a porosity of less than 2 % by volume.

Claim 15. (Currently Amended) The silicon nitride material of Claim 14, wherein the ~~material further comprises a sintering aid~~ rare earth metal oxide is selected from the group consisting of  $\text{Y}_2\text{O}_3$ [[,]] and  $\text{Sc}_2\text{O}_3$ [[,]] ~~rare earth metal oxides, and alkaline earth metal oxides.~~

Claim 16. (Previously Presented) The silicon nitride material of Claim 14, wherein the sintering aids and the silicon dioxide are present at an amount so that the grain boundary phase is < 20% by volume.

Claim 17. (Previously Presented) The silicon nitride material of Claim 14, wherein the sintering aids and the silicon dioxide are present at an amount so that the grain boundary phase is from 0.1 to 17% by volume.

Claim 18. (Previously Presented) The silicon nitride material of Claim 14, wherein the sintering aids and the silicon dioxide are present at an amount so that the grain boundary phase is from 3 to 15% by volume.

Claims 19 - 22. (Cancelled).

Claim 23. (Cancelled)

Claim 24. (New) The silicon nitride material of Claim 14 further comprising up to 15 mole percent of an additive selected from the group consisting of SiC, TiCN, TiN, HfO<sub>2</sub> and combinations thereof, said additive being retained as a disperse phase.

Claim 25. (New) The silicon nitride material of Claim 24 further comprising a silicide selected from the group consisting of tungsten silicide, molybdenum silicide and combinations thereof, wherein the TiN, tungsten silicide and molybdenum silicide are formed by reacting TiO<sub>2</sub>, WO<sub>3</sub> and MoO<sub>3</sub> with silicon nitride in a ratio of TiO<sub>2</sub>, WO<sub>3</sub> and MoO<sub>3</sub> to silicon nitride of up to 10 mole percent.